

# Little Monsters

*Critters 4*

*The Gate*



*Ghoulies*







**Critters**

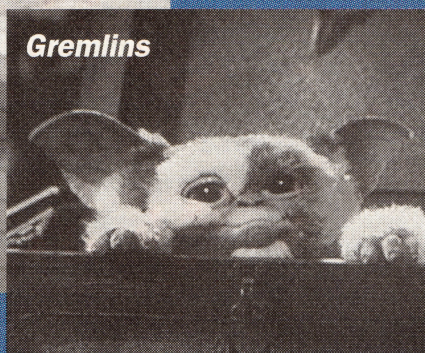
**Gate** (Medusa), spilling out of a hole in the ground to menace a bunch of feisty youngsters. The stop-motion effects here were excellent, and more than enough to make up for the general poverty of the plotting. **Gate II** (MGM/UA) brought us more of the same, only not so good. Intriguingly, the same sort of tiny monsters made a brief appearance in Charlie Band's recent *Subspecies* (Entertainment) - though if you look at the crafty trailer you'd think they

dubbed) came back in *Critters 2: The Main Course*, the plot of which revealed that the little monsters had had the good sense to lay some eggs before being splattered at the climax of the first movie. Pretty soon, Grover's Bend is up to its neck in the little buggers once more, and the bounty hunters from space are on the job again, splattering them left, right and centre. Note that when a Critter is hit by one of these massive space guns it sort of explodes in a fountain of green goo, a bit like the stuff Linda Blair spewed up in *The Exorcist*....

*Critters 3* (Entertainment In Video) seemed to have been inspired by *Die Hard*, because it had the fanged furballs invading a Los Angeles apartment building and chasing the inhabitants upwards. There's a sub-plot about a rotten landlord who is trying to squeeze the apartment-dwellers out (and of course pays a suitably gory price for his misdeeds by ending up as Critter-nosh.) Though more leisurely paced than the preceding two entries, *Critters 3* is quite fun because it concentrates on building up some decent characterisation along the way.

*Critters 4* (Entertainment) was actually shot back-to-back with the third movie, and consequently it comes as no surprise to discover it is of roughly the same quality. In fact it's a lot of fun, because this time the makers have set out to take the mickey out of *Aliens* - and succeeded quite well. The climax of the third film had bounty hunter Don Opper being blasted off into space in a shuttle, unaware that there were a few Critters eggs on board. This one kicks off with Opper's frozen body being defrosted, along with the "Krites," who hatch and proceed to go on a comical rampage round a futuristic space station. I fact I found the whole thing highly reminiscent of a funny *Star Trek* show called *The Trouble With Tribbles*, and a lot more fun than the dreary *Alien 3*!

There are already plans afoot for further installments in the *Critters* series, while Charlie Band is about to unleash more tiny terrors in *Doctor Mordrid* and *Puppet Master V*. At least he knows in advance he won't have any trouble with his stars wanting a bigger dressing room. And perhaps, in the end, that's a big part of their special lure for tightwad producers. Because, if they are a big success with the public, and a sequel is in order, the stars are not going to hold out for more money before they commit. Now all Hollywood needs to do is come up with a plastic version of Macaulay Culkin...



**Gremlins**

first *Child's Play* picture - wasn't it frightening when 'Chucky' still moved after his batteries had been taken out?

The two followups took away Chucky's power to frighten by making him just another stalk-and-slash icon, albeit a pint-sized one. And the same rules applied with *Dolly Dearest* (First Independent), a gender-bender variation of the *Child's Play* series which was quite spooky at the beginning but went to pieces once the doll started running around in the open, waving a knife at all and sundry. Would you be scared if your Barbie doll turned homicidal? Nahh! You'd just step on her, right?

That other 'B' movie legend, Roger Corman, has long specialised in ripping off other people's ideas, and it didn't take him long to get round to a project 'inspired' by *Gremlins*. Corman's *Gremloids* (PVG) was a one-joke spoof featuring an army of midget monsters who scurried about their evil but not particularly powerful leader. Despite a number of funny skits on other, better-known sci-fi movies, this one was far too episodic to work as a complete movie.

More little monsters turned up in the unusual supernatural thriller, *The*

were the stars of the show.

*Gremlins* only stretched to two movies, while the *Critters* saga seems destined to run and run. Just in case you're not acquainted with these flying furballs with teeth (who resemble the jaw-gnashing Tasmanian Devils from the Bugs Bunny cartoons), the original movie (which is available on sell-through from Columbia Tristar) told of how they escaped from an interplanetary prison and high-tailed it to Earth to cause havoc in the small rural community of Grover's Bend, Kansas.

Suffering the brunt of the Critter invasion was *ET*'s Dee Wallace Stone (who seems to attract strange space creatures like a magnet). She and her family don't know what to make of these murderous flying tumbleweeds - "They must be from Los Angeles," shrugs somebody at one point. But the truth comes out when a couple of intergalactic bounty hunters arrive on the scene to take on the Critters in an explosive finale that sees the family homestead blown to bits and then (through the magic of reverse photography) put back together again!

'The Krites,' (as they are frequently